

“House GOP takes step back on Confederate flags.”

Unbelievable—it is a shame. It is really a shame that House Republicans last night, very late last night, without warning, attempted to turn back important progress on taking down this terrible and divisive symbol.

This, of course, happens just weeks—days, literally—after nine Americans were slain in an historic Black church in Charleston, South Carolina. A terrible and tragic massacre committed by an evil individual, who wrapped himself in that very symbol, and celebrated the hate that it stood for.

I attended the funeral of Reverend Clementa Pinckney and, with other Members of Congress, grieved with that community in their pain. I saw that community asking themselves a question: Why, why does that hateful symbol, that flag, continue to fly over their State capitol?

On the same day that the South Carolina Legislature expressed the will of its people and the American people and voted overwhelmingly to take down this horrible symbol, on the same day that South Carolina voted to take down that hateful symbol, a Member of this House of Representatives came to this floor and offered an amendment to preserve that symbol in America's national parks—what a shame.

Amazon, Walmart, and Sears all have taken that symbol out of their stores and no longer sell it; but the Republican leadership allowed and would have allowed on voice vote an amendment to stand that would preserve the right to have that symbol sold in our national parks—what a shame.

I hope the American people are watching and paying attention to this because it is a moment of truth, I think, for this Congress. I hope and I pray that Democrats and Republicans—I know the feelings of the Democratic Caucus; we spoke about it this morning—but I hope will be joined by Republicans on the other side in turning back this awful amendment that would say horrible things about the progress that we hope that we had made just in the last few weeks.

I ask Americans to join us. Use social media, #takeitdown. Express yourself. Join with us in rejecting this horrible symbol of hate. Let's take it down.

THE CONFEDERATE FLAG, A SYMBOL OF PRIDE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address you here on the floor of the House of Representatives and being recognized.

I have been listening to this debate over the last week or so, and it has troubled me considerably to watch divisions being driven between the American people over symbolism that has now been redefined by a lot of Members of the opposite party.

I regret, like all of us do in this country, the tragic and brutal and evil murders of the nine people in Charleston, South Carolina. I pray for them and their families. They stood up and showed us an example of faith that I think surpasses any that I have seen in my lifetime by forgiving the killer.

I am not to that point in my faith, Mr. Speaker, the least that I can tell, but that was very moving. They didn't want to see a division created, they wanted to heal, and they wanted to see Christ's love come out of Charleston.

Charleston is a wonderful and beautiful city, and I don't know where I would go to find nicer people if I couldn't go actually home, Mr. Speaker, so I couldn't say enough good about that.

I have listened to this rhetoric that has poured forth over these days. It appears to me that it is now being turned into something that is division, rather than unifying.

We unified in our grief with the people of South Carolina, the people of Charleston. Now, we are seeing the Confederate battle flag be put up as a symbol to be redefined as something different than is understood by the majority of the American people.

□ 1130

I grew up in the North, Mr. Speaker, and the Confederate flag always was a symbol of the pride of the South from where I grew up. My family and my predecessors and my ancestors were abolitionists, and they went to war to put an end to slavery.

Mr. Speaker, I have now in my hand a leather-bound New Testament Bible that was carried in the shirt pocket of my great uncle, John Richardson, and it is written inside here. It was presented to him on the eve of his departure for the war in July of 1862.

He walked home 3 years to the day with this Bible in his shirt pocket, it having protected him. It has fly specks on it from laying open by the campfire. It has verses that are written in it. I have found his picture, his musket, his bayonet, his belt buckle, and his ink file.

That is what is left of this man who committed himself to putting an end to slavery. Yet, his cousin, my five times great-grandfather, was killed in that effort. Many gave their lives to put an end to slavery.

I was standing before the Lincoln Memorial, reading his second Inaugural Address, and I will read that into the RECORD, Mr. Speaker. This component is from Lincoln's second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1865, when he said:

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said: “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Mr. Speaker, these are not disputed numbers. The numbers of Americans

who were killed putting an end to slavery and saving the Union: 600,000.

Another number not disputed is the number of Black Africans who were brought to what is now the United States to be slaves: 600,000. I take you back to the words “until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword . . . ‘The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

A huge price has been paid. It has been paid primarily by Caucasian Christians. There are many who stepped up because they profoundly believed that they needed to put an end to slavery.

This country has put this behind us. It has been through this brutal and bloody battle. We have come back together for the Reconstruction, and we have healed this country together. I regret deeply that we are watching this country be divided again over a symbol of a free country.

When I go to Germany and see that they have outlawed the swastika, I look at them and I think: We have a First Amendment. That can't happen here in the United States because we are open enough. We have to tolerate the desecration of Old Glory, the American flag.

Yet, we have people here on the floor who say they are offended by a symbol. They are the ones who are putting it up for all to see, and then they are saying that we should outlaw that so the American people don't have a chance to see our heritage.

Everything about America's history is not glorious. Everything about our history is not right in our judgment, looking back in hindsight, but none of us know what it was like for the people who lived during that time, in that era.

We can accept our history. We can be proud of our history. We can unify our country. We can grieve for those who were murdered, and we can preserve our First Amendment rights.

SEMINAL MOMENTS IN TIME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, there are seminal moments in time.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor was a seminal moment in time that will live in infamy. The crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge was a seminal moment in time that will live in history. It was a turning point in the civil rights/human rights movement.

There are seminal moments in time.

The House of Representatives confronts a seminal moment in time. Will we allow the healing to continue or will we try to roll back the clock?

There are seminal moments in time.

If we take this vote—and I hope that we will not, and there is an indication that we may not—the taking of the vote, in and of itself, can be a seminal moment in time.

A vote to legitimize the Confederate flag—the battle flag—would be a seminal moment in time for the United